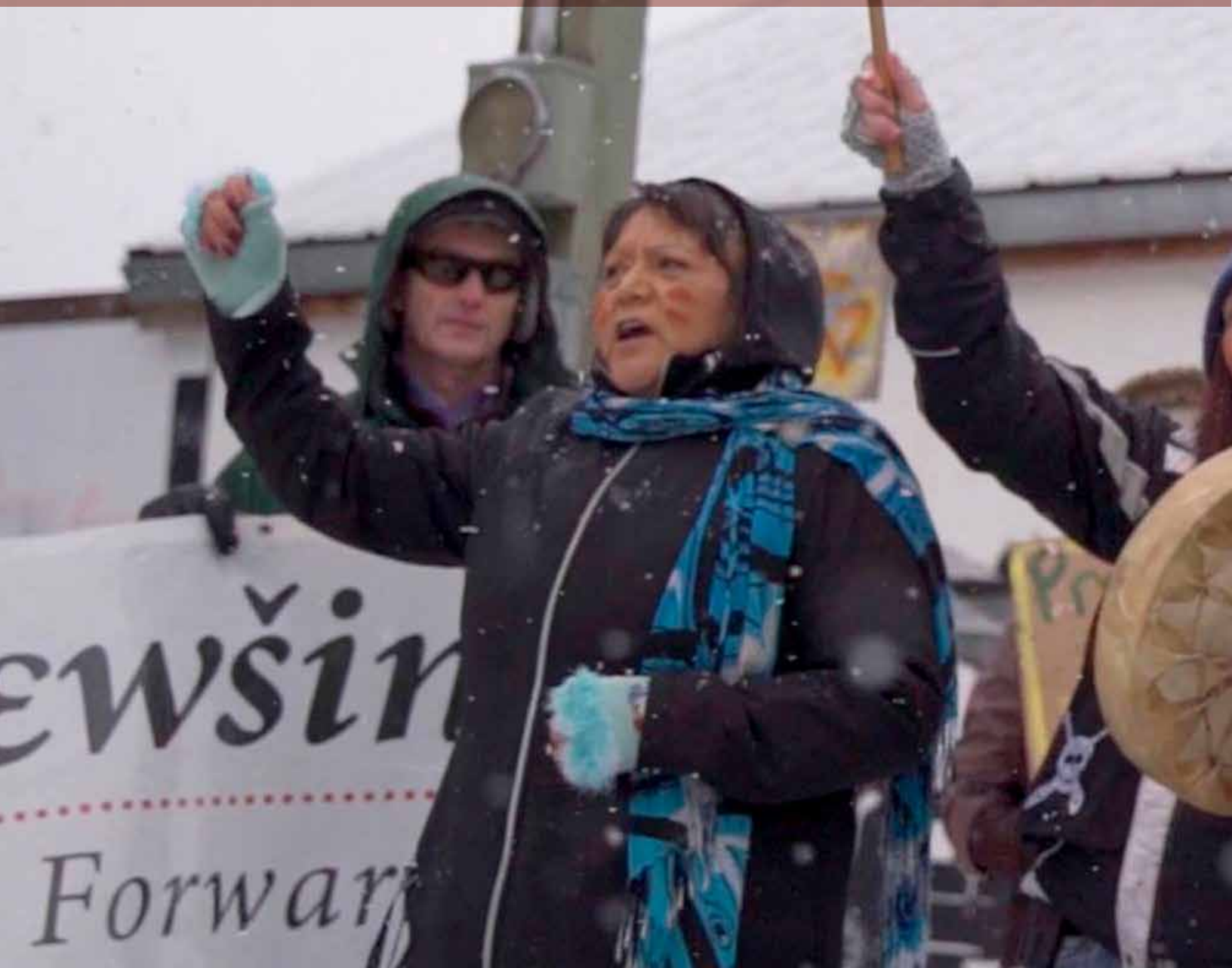
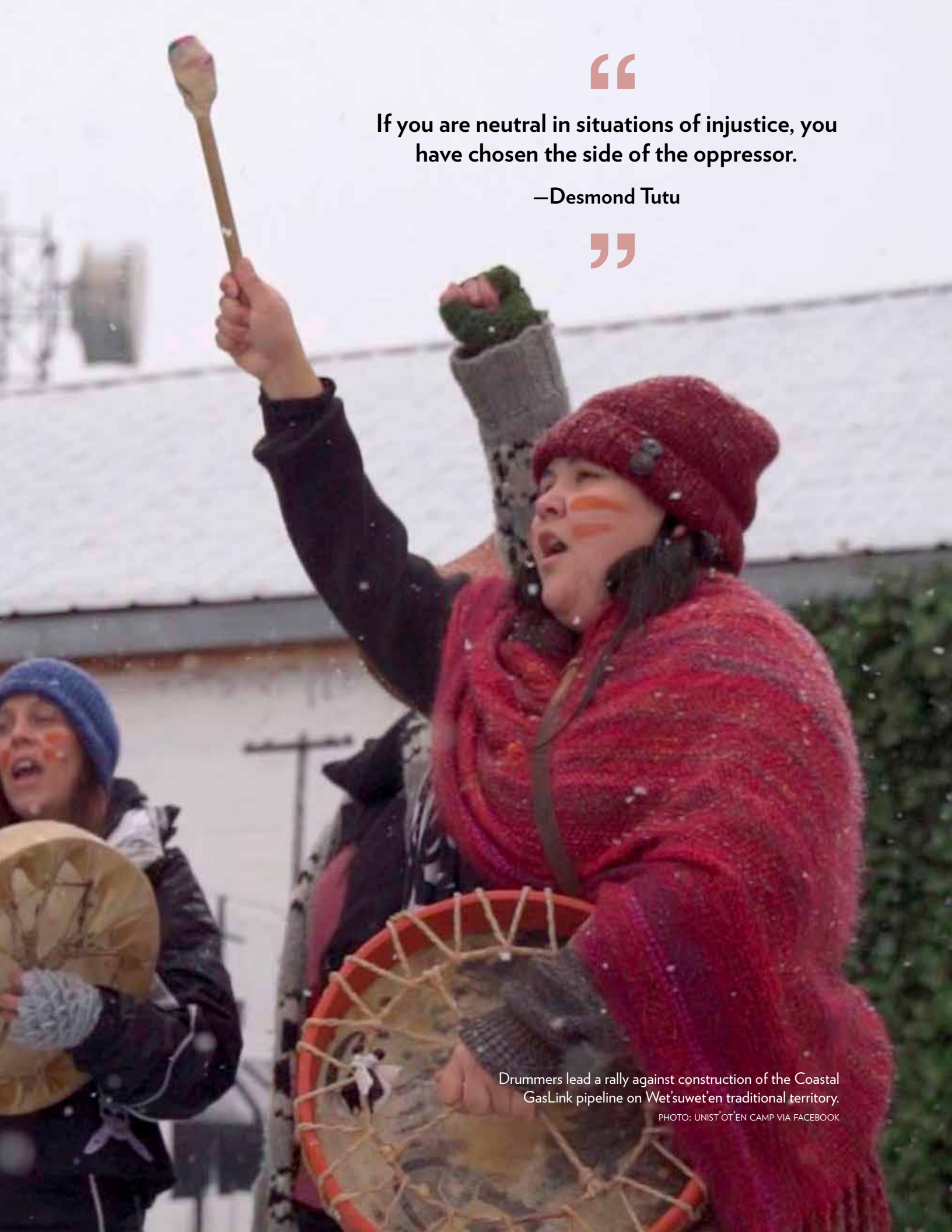
By Matt Gardner
STAFF WRITER

TAKING SIDES

Statements of support by Anglican leaders for the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs sparked debate on social media about the role of the Anglican Church of Canada in responding to such disputes. What can history and theology teach us about the role of Christians in situations of conflict or injustice?





If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.

—Desmond Tutu

Drummers lead a rally against construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline on Wet'suwet'en traditional territory.

PHOTO: UNIST'OT'EN CAMP VIA FACEBOOK

> **The one who first states a case seems right, until the other comes and cross-examines.**
>
> **—Proverbs 18:17**

Solidarity blockades and protests erupted across Canada in the first months of 2020 after the RCMP moved against camps set up to block the construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline in unceded Wet'suwet'en territory.

After initially setting up a roadblock on Wet'suwet'en land on Jan. 13, the RCMP led a raid against one of the camps occupied by Indigenous activists who describe themselves as land defenders. The RCMP's stated goal was to enforce a court injunction preventing disruption of pipeline construction.

Dozens of people were arrested during the Feb. 6 raid and in the following weeks. These arrests included three of the five Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs who opposed the building of the pipeline in their territory without the "free, prior and informed consent" of their nation's traditional leaders, as stipulated by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

In response to the police raids and arrests, supporters across Canada—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—rallied behind the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs. Protests were held at government offices and buildings, and blockades set up at ports and railways. Perhaps the most impactful was the blockade set up by members of the Mohawk First Nation on a stretch of railway in Tyendinaga, Ont., which caused Via Rail and the Canadian National Railway to shut down the railroads for several weeks. The economic impact of these blockades led Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to demand: "The barricades must now come down. The injunctions must be obeyed and the law must be upheld."

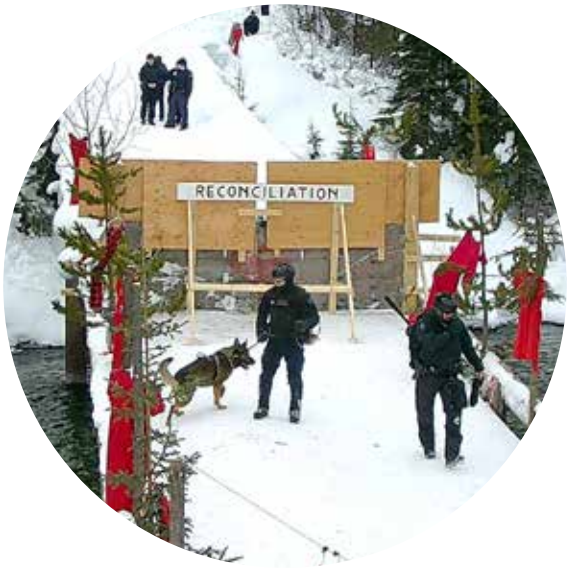
Debates over the blockades and protests eventually made their way into the Anglican Church of Canada. On Feb. 11, the church put out an official statement expressing "disappointment, distress and ongoing concern" over recent events on Wet'suwet'en territory, following up from a preliminary statement on Jan. 11 when tensions were mounting.

In this second statement, church leaders called on the government to "meet and speak to the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs and to have the RCMP stand down as they de-escalate the situation." Primate Linda Nicholls and National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Mark MacDonald signed this statement, as did six other Anglican bishops and archbishops.

On Feb. 18, the *Anglican Journal* published an article which reported that 71 church leaders had signed a statement of support with the Wet'suwet'en pipeline opposition. The statement called on the Canadian government and the RCMP to "immediately cease their occupation, arrests, and trespassing on Wet'suwet'en sovereign territory." Along with Anglican leaders were representatives of other Canadian churches.

Among those affixing their names to this statement

Matriarchs beat drums and call on ancestors as RCMP approach the last Wet'suwet'en camp on Feb. 10.
PHOTO: UNIST'OT'EN CAMP/TWITTER



RCMP cross the bridge leading to Unist'ot'en Camp in Wet'suwet'en territory.
PHOTO: UNIST'OT'EN CAMP/TWITTER

were MacDonald, Indigenous Ministries Coordinator Canon Ginny Doctor and National Reconciliation Animator Melanie Delva, as well as National Bishop Susan Johnson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. The *Anglican Journal* subsequently published two columns by the national Indigenous archbishop expressing his support for the "five traditional leaders of Wet'suwet'en."

The response among Anglicans on social media was swift. Many backed the church's support for the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and its call for the government and police to step down:

- "I am so glad that church leaders are taking a stand here. It does this younger Anglican great comfort and hope for the future of the Church and the world."
- "I am so thankful that the Churches have given this statement.... Our dear brothers and sisters living their faith in Wet'suwet'en give us such good example of how to be Christians. I know that so many young people are looking for a direction of how to live in faith, and to live in the courage that Christ asks us to hold in our hearts. This is the most beautiful moment of our Churches living into the message of the Gospel."
- "I am very proud of the Anglican Church leaders for taking this courageous stand as allies, leading and setting an example for colonial settler society. It is fitting, since they were one of the original perpetrators of the residential school genocide and some have continued in white supremacy ways to this day.... As a Métis person from Anishinabe, Treaty 3, Tyindenaga Mohawk, Cree and Salish parents I am only attending the Anglican Church because they are serious about their apology and are taking action in the stand with the Wet'suwet'en Nation.... I am proud to see a remnant of true believers in Jesus rise up and stand for truth."

Others expressed dismay that the church appeared to be supporting blockades that were affecting Canada's economy, and noted that elected band councils of the Wet'suwet'en had come out in support of the pipeline.

Some Anglicans, however, offered a different opinion: that in such disputes, the Anglican Church of Canada should not "take sides" at all.

A sampling of comments from the *Journal* Facebook page offers examples of this view:

- "I think it would be preferable if the churches worked to find a solution to this impasse, instead of taking sides and thereby creating more division. We are supposed to be peacemakers."
- "I support the First Nations in this issue. But it is not the church's place to take sides. As a church we are Peacemakers or should be."
- "Why doesn't it seem to matter that many First Nations people have given their consent for this

Oil pipeline in the mountains
PHOTO: PEYKER/SHUTTERSTOCK

> **Most of the native people in this area want this pipeline. Sad to see a church encouraging division in this country.**
> *—Facebook comment*

project? Why is our church supporting one group over another?"

- "Most of the native people in this area want this pipeline. Sad to see a church encouraging division in this country."

One of the most strident voices suggesting it was not the place of the church to "take sides" in this case was Joseph Quesnel, an Anglican from Tracadie, N.S. of northern Ontario Métis background.

Currently taking theology courses at the Atlantic School of Theology with an eye to potentially joining the vocational diocanate, Quesnel worked for more than 15 years as a policy analyst at the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, a Winnipeg-based think tank where he researched and wrote op-eds and commentary on topics related to Indigenous governance. Quesnel also served as editor of the now-defunct national Indigenous newspaper *Drum/First* and has appeared in numerous newspapers and media outlets addressing questions related to Indigenous issues.

Most recently, he worked as a program manager at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute in Ottawa, overseeing its "Aboriginal Canada and the Natural Resource Economy" project. This project seeks to bring together "a team of experienced experts" in the field of resource development to examine how "two sides—First Nations and business" can "work together to ensure our development of natural resources is safe, stable and reliable."

In his Facebook comments to the aforementioned *Journal* articles, Quesnel said that the church had "lost its way" by "supporting one side over another and "adopting a simplistic narrative about this complicated dispute." Responding to the article about church leaders signing the statement of support, he expressed anger and embarrassment that his church "would issue such an inflammatory and biased statement."

"The Anglican tradition," he added, "is moderate restraint and balance. None of that is in this statement."

These comments by Quesnel and other Anglicans were a major force in the writing of this *Epiphanies* article, which examines what it means for the church to take sides. Quesnel was happy to share his thoughts when the *Journal* reached out to him for further comments, while stressing that these were purely his own opinions and that he was not representing or speaking on behalf of any parish or diocese.

"I think in general, the church should promote peaceful resolution to disputes and good relations between the two or more sides in dispute," Quesnel says. "When it comes to issues involving gross injustice between groups, I think the church should side with the most marginalized and repressed groups." Thus, he believes "the church took the right side" when it

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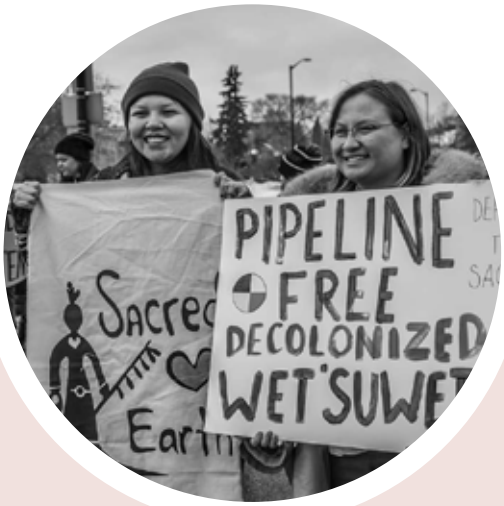


Supporters rally in support of hereditary chiefs
PHOTO: UNIST'OT'EN CAMP/FACEBOOK

supported ending apartheid in South Africa, or when it backed the civil rights movement in the United States.

In the case of the conflict between Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and the government, Quesnel believes that "the church should identify most with the Indigenous side in general, as the most disadvantaged."

However, he characterizes the matter as "an internal government dispute between two Indigenous bodies," and as such is not "about gross injustices" like South African apartheid and U.S. racial segregation. Rather, he says, it is about divisions between the hereditary chiefs, as well as between the hereditary chiefs and the elected band leadership.

"The matter of how an Indigenous community feels about this project is for them to resolve internally," Quesnel says. "Canada has a constitutionally mandated doctrine of duty to consult and accommodate Indigenous communities who are impacted by resource development."

Coastal GasLink, he adds, appears to have undertaken such consultations. "If the community feels there were flaws in the consultation process, they have legal mechanisms to challenge that."

Quesnel believes that the role of the Anglican Church of Canada in any conflict is to "be on the side of peaceful resolution." In the case of the standoff involving the Wet'suwet'en, the church "should call for governments to listen to both the dissident hereditary chiefs, the elected leadership, and the Wet'suwet'en people in general. It should call for the government to be as generous to the Indigenous side as possible as the disadvantaged party."

"It should call for peace at blockades sites. But, I think the church should call for an end to blockades that threaten to harm people and their livelihoods."

Delva, however, responds that Anglican leaders did take a mediatory role in publicly expressing their support for the Wet'suwet'en hereditary leadership.

"I would say that in releasing the statement, the Church is playing the role of peacemaker," Delva says.

"If the hereditary leadership had been consulted in good faith from the beginning, we would be in a very different situation. If the RCMP pulled out and construction ceased, real talks would be possible. People could meet without being under duress."

The question of whether Christians and the church should "take sides" in situations of conflict and injustice is an old one. According to one church historian, it is a debate that may go all the way back to Constantine, first Christian emperor of Rome.

Louis DeCaro, Jr. is an associate professor of church history at Nyack College's Alliance Theological Seminary in New York City, and has served as a pastor at two multiethnic congregations. DeCaro notes that

John Brown portrait, 1859. Reproduction of daguerreotype attributed to Martin M. Lawrence. PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

during the first 300 years of Christian history, Christians occupied a very different position as a persecuted sect who were all "on the same side" against the might of Rome.

In the wake of Constantine's ascent to power, Christianity began a shift that would take it from a marginalized faith to the state religion. But with that shift came new questions.

"When Christians become sharers of power, then what happens?" DeCaro asks. "It's easier to be perhaps pure of heart and consistent with the gospel of Christ when you're the one who's bleeding. But once you start wielding power, for better and for worse—this is our issue. This is our history."

Much of DeCaro's own research focuses on one of the most vivid examples in history of Christians "taking sides": the issue of slavery in the United States.

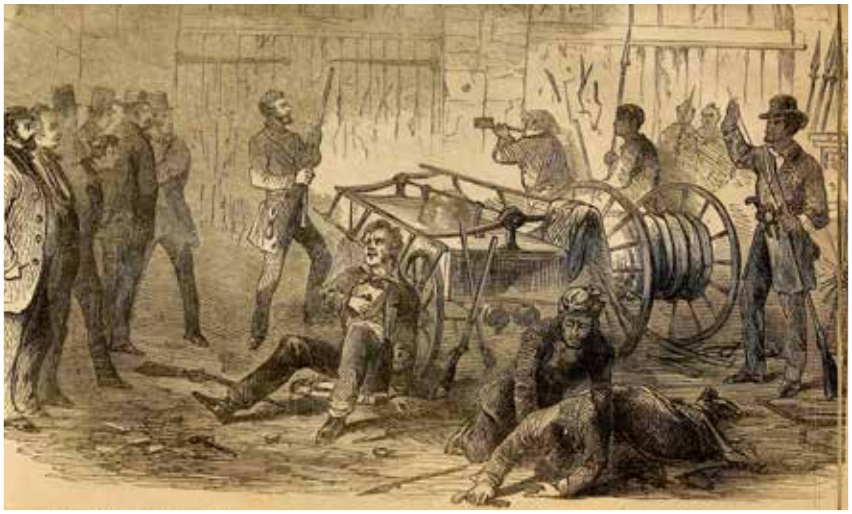
In particular, he has authored numerous works about the Christian abolitionist John Brown, who in 1859 led an armed raid against a federal armory in Harpers Ferry, Virginia hoping to spark a movement to overthrow slavery. Brown was tried for treason and hanged, but his actions accelerated the events that would culminate in the U.S. Civil War.

In 19th-century America, the vast majority of the population identified as Christian. The question of slavery, however, was the subject of intense debate among self-identified Christians. Both pro-slavery and anti-slavery voices quoted passages from the Bible to justify their positions.

"I wish I could say that abolitionism, or maybe to put it more specifically, the end of slavery was primarily driven by the movement of the church or Christianity," DeCaro says. "But I think in fact, the church failed to do that. It's funny, because it was very much a religious culture 150-plus years ago. The church was central to life in both the North and the South."

Reflecting society as a whole at this time, the American abolitionist movement was "replete with Christians," he says. First to call for the abolition of slavery were the Quakers, followed by other Protestant groups. All of the major abolitionists during the antebellum era, such as William Lloyd Garrison, were Christians, and the abolitionist movement in its early phases was strongly evangelical in spirit.

The abolitionists were also a non-violent movement



John Brown and his men raid Harpers Ferry Armory in 1859, part of an effort to spark a slave uprising.

PHOTO: INTERNET ARCHIVE BOOK IMAGES

and identified as pacifists. DeCaro compares them to the "Martin Luther King Jr. wing" of the civil rights movement, in that their strategy largely based itself on a campaign of moral persuasion—"that you're going to change the hearts of slaveholders by telling the stories of the oppressed and by preaching at them and calling them to justice."

As a result, though the abolitionists did extensive work such as publishing anti-slavery newspapers, their efforts were comparatively limited in scope.

The 1840s and '50s would see the growth of a more political abolitionism, as the movement was increasingly joined by formerly enslaved people such as Frederick Douglass. Though these black abolitionists were also Christian, their horrific stories of slavery led to an increasingly militant tone in the movement.

With the beginning of the 1850s, DeCaro says, "you're starting to see the possibilities of slavery ending peacefully coming to an end." Developments such as the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 and the Dred Scott Supreme Court decision in 1857 caused a reaction among abolitionists in the North.

"They became, more and more and more, advocates of using strategic attacks and so forth, although really, nothing was being done," DeCaro says. "And that's the significance of John Brown, because John Brown was the only guy who made a plan and then actually tried to enact it."

Brown himself defined his opposition to slavery as an expressly religious movement.

A Congregationalist in the Reformed tradition with a Calvinistic background, Brown was very devout and had a high view of the Bible. Influenced by the theological ideas of postmillenarism—the idea that the Second Coming of Christ would follow a great worldwide movement of Christians towards justice—Brown felt with an intense fervour that he had been called by God to work against slavery.

He also sharply criticized the pacifism that dominated the abolitionist movement, once proclaiming: "These men are all talk. What we need is action—action!" In leading the raid against Harpers Ferry, he hoped to destabilize slavery through the South by arming slaves and leading a mountain-based campaign to disrupt the economic operations of the slave system.

But Brown's attempted raid of Harpers Ferry met with wide condemnation from most sectors of society, even those ostensibly opposed to slavery—including the established churches.

Though there were people within each church on both sides of the slavery debate in the 19th century, the Episcopal Church and the Roman Catholic Church did not split over slavery. However, all other Protestant denominations "split hard" over their contrasting views

I think sometimes Christ is mistaken as if the philosophy that he was teaching was a total political philosophy or a total political strategy. It's not.... It's a worldview.

— Louis DeCaro, Jr.

on slavery, DeCaro says.

The southern Protestant churches were unified in their condemnation of Brown, calling him a "criminal" and a "terrorist" who reflected the worst intentions of the North. Meanwhile, the churches of the North were divided between anti-slavery churches and those who saw the South's "peculiar institution" as acceptable. The Episcopal Church appeared to have made no official statements about slavery one way or the other.

"Many of the churches that condemned John Brown were allegedly anti-slavery, but believed that this was a matter that God had to take care of in his own time," DeCaro says.

"They didn't believe in interfering. So he was widely condemned by traditional churches—even some of his own colleagues. In fact, he had a cousin who was a renowned clergyman and theologian, and this cousin wrote him a letter in jail basically saying, 'We think you've lost your mind.'"

But what must be realized, DeCaro says, is that by the time John Brown took action in 1859, "there were no options. There really weren't any options."

Brown's acts "have to be weighed into what's possible. Obviously he's willing to take up arms and fight if necessary, and kill if necessary. But in that situation, I really think that that was all that there was left to do."

DeCaro emphasizes that each situation must be looked at in its own context, and that Christians should strive as much as possible to live in peace. Supporters of the Wet'suwet'en in Canada, he notes, may view the blockades as "a better measure as opposed to violence."

"The Christian can ask of himself, 'What should I do as a Christian?' But what should the Christian do as a citizen?" DeCaro asks.

"I think sometimes Christ is mistaken as if the philosophy that he was teaching was a total political philosophy or a total political strategy. It's not.... It's a worldview. But as citizens go...if there are gross injustices, people are suffering, and the state is not addressing the issues, then some direct action has to be taken. That was Martin Luther King's strategy. He did it non-violently but he still became disruptive.

"So I personally would say, there's a basis for direct action. But again, one has to 'count the cost,' to use the words of Christ.... You have to be prepared to pay the price, because once you take a certain route, there are going to be certain consequences. I think that that's hard—that every Christian activist who's going to take action against injustice has to count the cost and then be prepared to take the consequences. Because John Brown was prepared to die."

One 20th-century figure who, like John Brown, was prepared to accept the consequences of taking action against injustice was Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

A German evangelical pastor, theologian and founding member of the Confessing Church, Bonhoeffer became known for his resistance to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime. Like Brown, Bonhoeffer was a marginalized figure who garnered little support from the established churches of his day.

In the 1930s, Bonhoeffer established an underground seminary in Germany. During the Second World War, he gained a position at the military intelligence office

thanks to connections from his brother-in-law, who occupied a high rank there. Ostensibly tasked with making contacts with neutral nations, Bonhoeffer instead used his position to serve as a "double agent," trying through his church relationships to make connections between Allied forces and the German Resistance.

After Bonhoeffer embezzled money from the military intelligence office to help 14 Jews escape to Switzerland, he was arrested for misappropriation of funds. His trial was postponed through 1944, when files were discovered linking him to the failed assassination attempt against Hitler. Imprisoned at the Flossenbürg concentration camp, Bonhoeffer was executed by hanging in 1945, only weeks before the end of the war.

Barry Harvey, a professor of theology at Baylor University in Waco, Texas and an ordained Baptist minister, has conducted extensive research into the life and thought of Bonhoeffer. In his book *Taking Hold of the Real: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Profound Worldliness of Christianity*, Harvey suggests that according to Bonhoeffer, Christians are compelled to participate in "profound this-worldliness": to act in the world out of self-understanding of what this world is and what is possible.

"To be a Christian is to participate in both God's judgement on, but also the redemption of, the world," Harvey says. "It puts you, if you will, in harm's way.... [Bonhoeffer] talks about it in terms of being 'for others'. Christ is the one for others, and through faith we participate in that, which ultimately means taking actions that might...involve breaking one or more of God's commandments."

The actions during the war of Bonhoeffer, who saw himself as a pacifist, illustrate that conviction. While writing clandestinely against the Nazi dictatorship and its persecution of the Jews, Bonhoeffer took actions in the background that Harvey says "otherwise ran against his understanding of Christian discipleship."

"Whether or not ultimately [Bonhoeffer] was in favour of the assassination attempt, he did participate in a conspiracy against Hitler and the National Socialists, which, in a certain sense, could be viewed as breaking God's commandment," Harvey says. "But the situation demanded it, because the injustice was so egregious that he couldn't ignore it."

In his own writings, Bonhoeffer uses the metaphor of

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PHOTO: BUNDESARCHIV BILD 146-1987-074-16

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— Barry Harvey

a cart on a hillside that is running out of control down the hill. For anyone faced with such a situation, the only way to stop the cart is to throw oneself into the spoke of the wheel.

But Bonhoeffer's own attempts to confront the Nazi regime also marginalized him from mainstream German life, including the established churches. Bonhoeffer fell out of favour after teaching at the University of Berlin because he did not support either the Nazis or a movement known as the German Christians, which Harvey calls "oddly reminiscent of some things going on here in the United States—a very nationalistic understanding [of Christianity], including a claim that God had given Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist state to Germany as a kind of revelation."

The Rev. Tony Harwood-Jones, a retired Anglican priest in the diocese of Rupert's Land, sums up the isolation that Bonhoeffer faced among fellow Christians across Germany.

"His society went into an atrocious state, and he spoke for the Christian mindset, but it was not shared by his fellow Lutherans," Harwood-Jones says. "Many Lutheran pastors wore jackboots and had swastikas up in the front of their churches."

Faced with such a situation, Bonhoeffer had strong criticism for those who tried to evade their moral responsibility as Christians to stand against injustice. Harvey quotes from a letter that Bonhoeffer wrote from prison to one of his close friends after 10 years of the Nazi dictatorship, reflecting on what had happened to them and what they had learned:

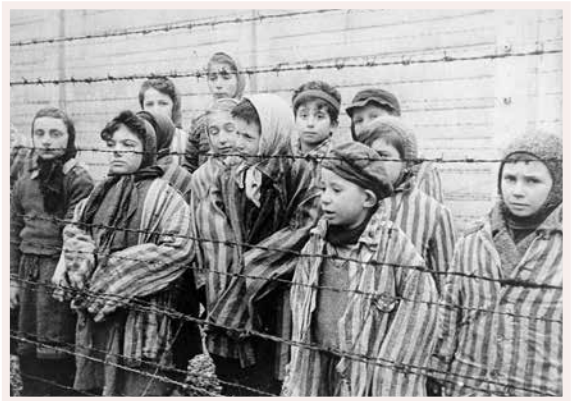
> In flight from public discussion and examination, this or that person may well attain the sanctuary of private virtuousness. But he must close his eyes and mouth to the injustice around him. He can remain undefiled by the consequences of responsible action only by deceiving himself. In everything he does, that which he fails to do will leave him no peace. He will either perish from that restlessness or turn into a hypocritical, self-righteous, small-minded human being.

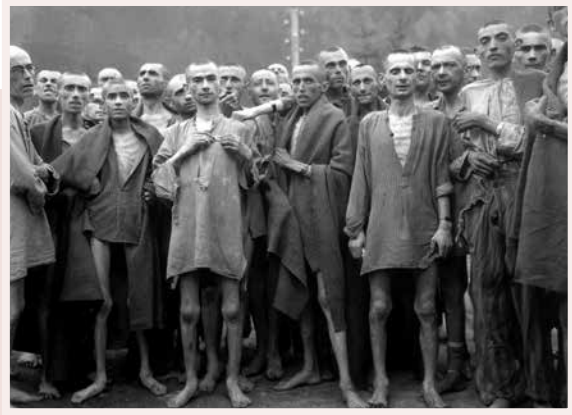
"There's no *not* taking sides if there is injustice there," Harvey says. "Not for Bonhoeffer."

Is it fair to compare the response of the Anglican Church of Canada to the standoff between Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and the Canadian government with the response of Christians to some of history's worst atrocities, such as slavery and the crimes of the Nazis?

Some Anglicans, such as Quesnel, believe the answer is a firm "no"—arguing that "gross injustices" such as apartheid and segregation simply do not compare to the dispute over the authority of the hereditary chiefs and the Coastal GasLink pipeline.

Harwood-Jones says that if one were to make





The horrors of Nazism and the Holocaust, Harvey suggests, compelled Bonhoeffer to take actions that "otherwise ran against his concept of Christian discipleship."

PHOTOS: PUBLIC DOMAIN

comparisons between the Wet'suwet'en standoff and episodes such as the abolitionists' opposition to slavery or Dietrich Bonhoeffer's opposition to the Nazis, "it does imply a conclusion."

"Everybody knows [today] that Dietrich was on the right side and he lost his life for it," Harwood-Jones says. But at the time, he says, "Dietrich wasn't well-received by his fellow Lutherans."

When looking at such episodes in the present day, he adds, Anglicans do so with the "judgement of history." As an example of this judgement closer to the history of their own church, Harwood-Jones cites the Indian residential school system.

At the time the residential schools were set up, he says, the "mostly British overlords in Canada" thought they were doing a favour to Indigenous children by sending them to school and that their parents would thank them for the "wonderful opportunity." The Anglican church ran many of these residential schools and echoed such views.

But with the passage of time, and the coming forward of Indigenous survivors to share stories of the physical, sexual and emotional abuse they suffered in the schools as children—and the conclusion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that the schools' attempt to eradicate Indigenous languages and cultures was a form of "cultural genocide"—church leaders now view the residential school system in overwhelmingly negative terms.

For Anglicans who worked in the schools and sincerely believed they were doing the right thing, such radical shifts in opinion can be difficult to comprehend.

"I was pastor to an old priest and I held his hand [at] his deathbed," Harwood-Jones recalls. "He was crying, because he had been the principal of a residential school and he had loved his kids and his kids had thrived, and he felt so hated now by Canadian society."

"I warn people today…the things we think are good today will be vilified 100 years from now if we're not careful," he adds. "So we don't want to be too dogmatic. If you want to say the [Wet'suwet'en] hereditary chiefs are on the right side of God, and that the church should support them, well, be my guest. But you will get blowback."

During the blockades in support of the Wet'suwet'en, Indigenous activists experienced one type of blowblack in the form of confrontations with counter-protesters—

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— The Rev. Tony Harwood-Jones

some associated with the far-right Yellow Vest Canada movement, who forcibly dismantled the blockades while police looked on. At another point, a bomb threat was made against Mohawk blockaders in Tyendinaga.

Some of the rhetoric by public figures at the peak of the blockades echoed language used against the likes of John Brown.

Writing in the *National Post* on Feb. 11, columnist Stephen LeDrew called for police action against those he deemed "lawbreakers." Activists supporting the Wet'suwet'en through rallies and blockades, he wrote, were not engaging in acts of protest, but rather "insurrection." At a meeting of the House of Commons public safety and national security committee on Feb. 27, Conservative MP Doug Shipley asked Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Minister Bill Blair whether the blockades were being deemed as "terrorist activity" under the Criminal Code of Canada. (Blair replied that they were not.)

In his own ministry, Harwood-Jones has learned much about the views of those confronting Wet'suwet'en land defenders and their supporters on the ground. Though formally retired as a priest, he has kept busy by accepting the position of chaplain to the Manitoba RCMP Veterans' Association.

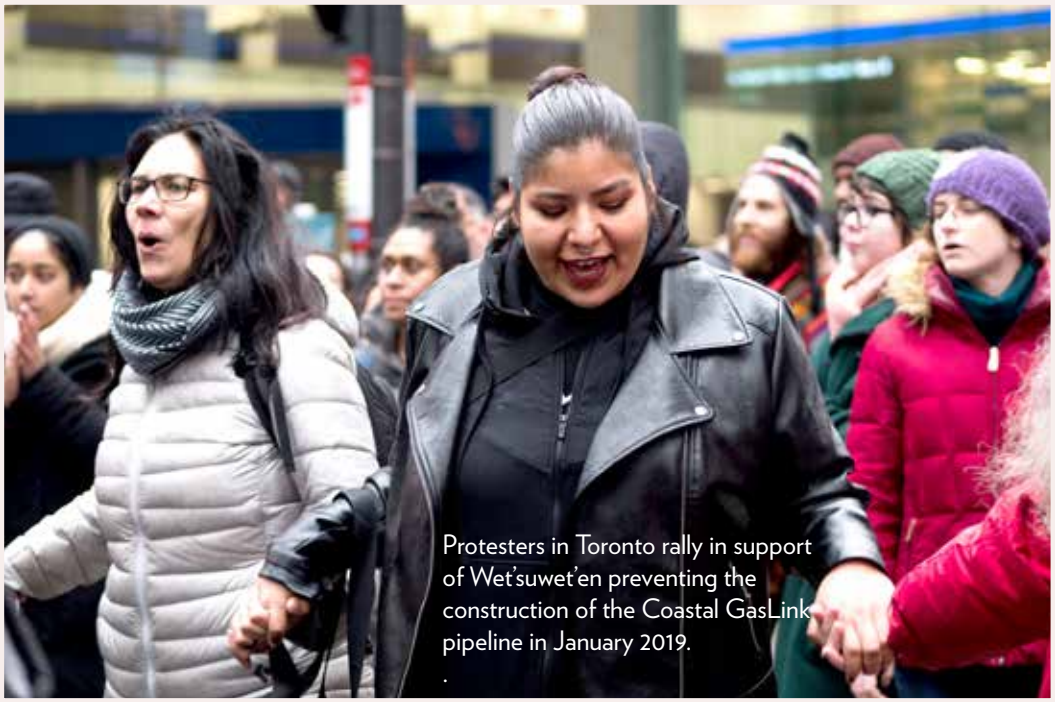
For the purposes of this article, Harwood-Jones emphasizes that he is speaking simply as an "observer." But in serving as a chaplain to retired RCMP officers, he has learned something about the predominant mentality among police who confront Indigenous land defenders or those who have erected blockades.

By and large, Harwood-Jones says, police officers "favour law and order." If asked, he believes, the majority of police would say their job is simply to enforce the law. "We've employed these people to support the law of the land, not their own opinion," he says.

Harwood-Jones cites a reflection sent to the RCMP Veterans' Association by James Forrest, communications director for the association. In this article, entitled *Charter Trumps Everything*, retired police incident commander James Hardy Supt describes how police officers themselves often feel caught between opposing sides—between enforcing federal and provincial statutes, and facilitating protests and tolerating "some" civil disobedience, the latter guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Supt writes:

> The police officers in Canada are dedicated but, in many cases, demoralized. Recruiting is becoming difficult. Despite the community involvement that a majority of our officers participate in, it is never enough. We are split between social work and law enforcement. Our people are dedicated and will be there when you need them, but in my opinion, our officers are having an increasingly difficult time figuring out what the rules are. We are an extension of Canadian society. Canadian society will have to determine what the police role is.



Protesters in Toronto rally in support of Wet'suwet'en preventing the construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline in January 2019.
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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/UNDR

Faced with a situation in which grievances have been expressed both by Wet'suwet'en land defenders and by those impacted economically by blockades, leaders of the Anglican Church of Canada—particularly those involved in Indigenous ministries—have supported the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, as documented earlier in this article.

For Canon Doctor, whether the church should take sides in situations of conflict or injustice depends on the movitation. In the specific case of Wet'suwet'en land defenders, she believes her decision to support that "side" flows from the commitments made by Christians in the baptismal covenant.

"When we are baptized, a covenant is made between us and God.... Part of that covenant is that we will strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being," Doctor says.

"So for me, it's a no-brainer. Yes, the church needs to take sides, if you truly believe and support your covenant.... If we are really baptized Christians in the Anglican Church, then yes, we need to be on the side of justice. From my standpoint of view, it is a point of justice because people are defending lands that were taken from them, or lands that could be taken from them."

Another commitment made at baptism, Doctor says, is to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation. The Marks of Mission also remind Anglicans of this commitment, and the need to transform unjust structures.

"If you put a pipeline through any land—not only Indigenous land, but any lands—you are putting that in jeopardy because of damaging leaks...and that's a given," Doctor says. "Every day I read about pipelines leaking or catching fire or whatever. It's catastrophic to the land, and people don't see it. People just see the money side, and that's their main ambition."

The national Indigenous archbishop, Doctor points out, has spoken many times about idolatry and how it leads the focus of people away from God. One idol, Archbishop MacDonald has said, is the "culture of money" which he calls on Christians to reject.

While supporters of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs describe the pipeline standoff as another manifestation of centuries of colonialism, opponents of the blockades focus on the blockades' harmful economic effects. How should the church navigate such a dispute in which two sides claim grievances?

"I think what's important here is the history, and to look at the history of Canada and First Nations people and to see how the history [informs] the situation today," Doctor says. "When [opponents of the blockades] look at that history, they will see that it's something that is repetitive and it's something that can be fixed, can be straightened out.

"But again, it comes down to accepting that Indigenous people have inherent rights, and one of those rights is the right to live on their lands, and the right to be free to live on their lands, and the right to protect

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>
> *— Ginny Doctor*

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Delva suggests that the question "Should the church take sides in situation of conflict or injustice?" is more complex than one might assume.

For one, there are often more than two sides to a story. In the gospels, she notes, Jesus will often identify and land on a "third way" when people try to get him to choose one option or another, forcing them to examine the question from a completely different perspective.

In the case of Wet'suwet'en, Delva believes that the Anglican Church of Canada in fact did not take a side. Rather, the statements signed by the primate and national Indigenous archbishop say that they support the right of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary leadership to be consulted and to give free, prior and informed consent. Finally, Delva believes that there is a distinction between "conflict" and "injustice."

"When there is conflict between groups of equal power and privilege, then I can see how the church could act more as an intermediary, a 'peace-maker,' Delva says. "But injustice is something different. Injustice happens when a group with power and privilege uses that against another group.

"That is what is happening in the case of the Wet'suwet'en. Jesus was very clear about our need as Christians to take a stand against oppression. When there is injustice, I do believe we must take a stand. Jesus told us the side we should land on—that of the poor, widowed, orphaned, oppressed."

Quesnel acknowledges that the "two issues presented" in the standoff between those supporting the blockades and those opposing them were not equivalent. But he aims his main criticism at those who erected the blockades.

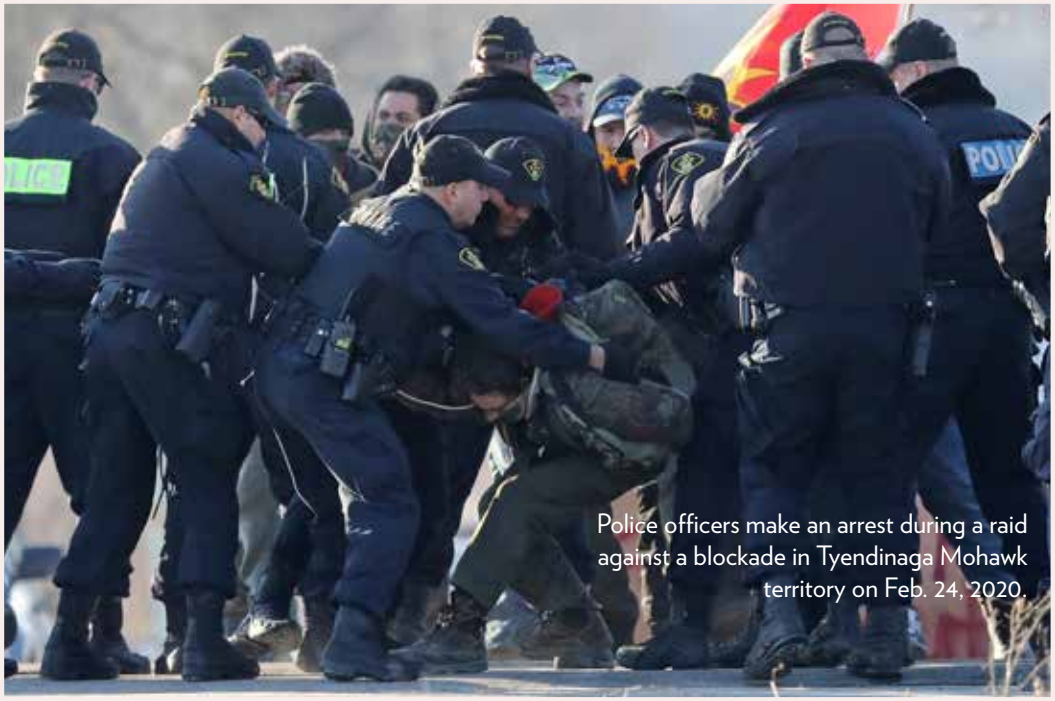
"The blockaders acted outside the law and did not seem to have much care how their behaviour impacted many other people, including many vulnerable people.... These blockaders act on their own accord and seemed very callous towards the general public," he says.

Maintaining that there is nothing incompatible between calling for the blockades to end and supporting Indigenous rights more broadly, Quesnel says that Indigenous rights in Canadian society are "rights embedded within a constitutional structure."

The realization of those rights, he adds, takes place through the courts and lawful processes. He supports the right of the Wet'suwet'en to appeal the pipeline project and says he would support the court's decision if it ruled the project did not meet required standards.

"It is not appropriate to fight over these specific legal rights out on the streets or on the backs of Canadian workers," Quesnel says.

"Indigenous rights are not absolute rights and the church should not treat [them] as such. The church is also responsible to all Canadians, not just one segment, even if it is an underprivileged one. Taking a position in



Police officers make an arrest during a raid against a blockade in Tyendinaga Mohawk territory on Feb. 24, 2020.

PHOTO: REUTERS/CHRIS HELGREN

favour of Indigenous rights is fine, but there are problems when that right comes into tension with the right of Canadians to engage in their jobs and livelihoods and the right to have the necessities of life."

Quesnel argues that UNDRIP "does not somehow make the elected [band] government illegitimate in our system." UNDRIP, he says, "is an aspirational, non-legally binding document that should not be used to further conflict within Indigenous communities."

Quesnel's views echo those of both Conservative and Liberal federal governments, who have expressed similar attitudes towards UNDRIP.

When the UN General Assembly first adopted UNDRIP in 2007, there were only four nations who opposed the declaration: the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. In 2010, the Conservative government of Stephen Harper endorsed UNDRIP, but called it merely an "aspirational" document and never took any concrete action to apply its principles in Canada

In 2015, the Liberal election platform pledged that the party, if elected to form a government, would "enact the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, starting with the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." In May 2016, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Carolyn Bennett stated that the Liberal government of Justin Trudeau was committed to "fully adopting [UNDRIP] and working to implement it within the laws of Canada."

Just two months later, however, Minister of Justice Jody Wilson-Raybould called UNDRIP "unworkable" and dismissed it as "a political distraction." Following the 2019 re-election of a Liberal government, Trudeau immediately signalled his intention to push forward with expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline. In his support of the Coastal GasLink pipeline, Trudeau finds himself opposed to the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs who do not support the building of a pipeline on their land and claim that the Wet'suwet'en traditional leadership has not give its free, prior and informed consent, as required by UNDRIP.

In explaining why she signed the statement supporting the Wet'suwet'en pipeline opposition and calling on the Canadian government and RCMP to withdraw from Wet'suwet'en territory, Delva cites the endorsement of UNDRIP by both "our country and our church."

She also notes that Council of General Synod unanimously passed a motion stating that the Anglican Church of Canada stands in solidarity with Indigenous peoples "in asserting and advocating their right to free, prior, and informed consent concerning the stewardship of traditional indigenous lands and water rights, and in acknowledging and responding to their calls for solidarity."

Delva says that actions taken by the Canadian government and the RCMP in the standoff with

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>
> *— Melanie Delva*

Wet'suwet'en land defenders and supporters contravene many articles of UNDRIP, including:

- Article 10, which states that "Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories";
- Article 18:, which notes that "Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decisionmaking institutions";
- Article 22, requiring that particular attention be paid to the rights and special needs of Indigenous elders, women, children and youth, and that states in conjunction with Indigenous peoples should take measures to protect Indigenous women and children from "all forms of violence and discrimination"; and
- Articles 25-29, which give Indigenous people the right to control their traditional territories and to conserve the environment therein, and that states shall establish and implement assistance programs for Indigenous people to conserve and protect these environments.

The Anglican Church of Canada, Delva says, has taken clear stances on UNDRIP, Indigenous rights and reconciliation.

"We have said that these are things we 'back'. We have also said that we will take our lead from Indigenous peoples on these issues. Now that I have seen the backlash to the stance that the church has taken on Wet'suewt'en, I wonder if the church really understood what those commitments really mean in the 'real world'.

"We obviously need more education on UNDRIP, its articles, what they mean both literally in terms of what the words and phrases of the articles mean, but also what they 'look like' in situations such as this. If we are committed to what we say we are committed to, I do not see how we could act differently with integrity."

Contrary to those who would make distinctions between elected band councils and hereditary chiefs, Delva says, "respecting Indigenous authority and self-determination means respecting *all* of it.

"We as settlers who force elected leadership on Indigenous communities have no right to later throw elected leaders under the bus and say their voices are not valid. That is what colonial 'divide and conquer' looks like. The hereditary leadership was left out of this process. We are saying that that is not right."

In evaluating the impact of the protests and blockades, one must acknowledge another fact: they appear to have been effective.

On March 2, after days of negotiations, Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and senior ministers of the federal government reached a tentative deal centred on Indigenous rights and land titles.

While work on the Coastal GasLink pipeline resumed shortly thereafter, Chief Woos, one of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary leaders, said that the central dispute over the

Police tore down the red dresses that were hung to hold the spirits of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two spirit people. They extinguished our sacred fire.

— From a report published on Unist'ot'en Camp website, "Reconciliation is Dead. Revolution is Alive."

pipeline remained. *The Canadian Press* reported that Woos called the agreement a milestone for all parties, but also said the "degree of satisfaction is not what we expected."

"We are going to be continuing to look at some more conversations with B.C. and of course with the proponent and further conversation with the RCMP," Woos added. "It's not over yet."

The RCMP raids and subsequent wave of solidarity across Canada, however, have changed the views of many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people regarding the very idea of reconciliation.

On Feb. 10, the RCMP moved into territory of the Unist'ot'en, or Big Frog Clan, who describe themselves on a website for the Unist'ot'en camp as "the original Wet'suwet'en Yintah Wewat Zenli distinct to the lands of the Wet'suwet'en." A description of these events on the Unist'ot'en camp website bore the headline: *Reconciliation is Dead. Revolution is Alive*. It reports:

"On February 10, RCMP invaded unceded Unist'ot'en territory, arresting and forcibly removing Freda Huson (Chief Howilhkat), Brenda Michell (Chief Geltiy), Dr. Karla Tait, and four Indigenous land defenders from our yintah. They were arrested in the middle of a ceremony to honour the ancestors. Police tore down the red dresses that were hung to hold the spirits of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two spirit people. They extinguished our sacred fire.

"We have had enough. Enough dialogue, discussion, negotiation at the barrel of a gun. Canada comes to colonize. Reconciliation is dead.

"It is time to fight for our land, our lives, our children, our future. Revolution lives."

Hearing the words of this headline, Doctor expresses her hope that reconciliation is still alive.

But the mention of revolution, she adds, is "playing like a record to me" as a "child of the '70s." During the 1970s, Doctor witnessed the radicalization of Indigenous protest in forms such as the American Indian Movement, which resisted government authority through actions such as the occupation of the abandoned Alcatraz prison from November 1969 to June 1971.

"I think revolution has always been there—maybe not as stark and maybe not as hard-hitting as it has become in Canada now, but it's always been there," Doctor says. "Our people have always stood their ground. If they see something, an encroachment on land, they definitely rise to protect it. I witnessed it where I grew up, where they were trying to expand the road onto what was our Indigenous land. They did it without consultation, and this of course was before 'free, prior and informed consent.' They just thought they had the right to do that.... The people rose up, they protested and they stopped it."

"We have so little left that yes, we have to revolt," she adds. "Yes, we have to protect it. Otherwise we'll end up with nothing."

Like DeCaro in describing the outlooks of John

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— Canon Ginny Doctor

Brown in the abolitionist movement and Martin Luther King in the civil rights movement, Doctor believes that there are some cases where direct action is necessary. For many years in both Canada and the United States, she notes, it has been a popular form of protest to go on walks. Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists, for example, have gone on walks to bring attention to issues such as missing and murdered Indigenous women. "But when it comes right down to it, what good does it really do?" she asks.

When the Wet'suwet'en and their supporters took direct action, Doctor acknowledges, the blockades indeed disrupted the economy. But for those in positions of power, she says, "that's the language they know and that's the language they speak to.... 'Oh, we're losing money!'"

In this way, direct action forces those in power to listen. Mohawk people in particular, Doctor says, "have been famous for that. They're more prone to direct action than any other Indigenous people I know." At both the takeover of Alcatraz and the railroad blockade at Tyendinaga, Mohawks played a leading role.

When she studied at the King Center in Atlanta on non-violent approaches to social change, Doctor learned that there are different steps on the path to reach reconciliation.

"One of those steps [is that] when all else fails, you have to take direct action," she says. "But that direct action has to be peaceful, it has to be non-violent, and I truly believe that that's what our people are trying to do.

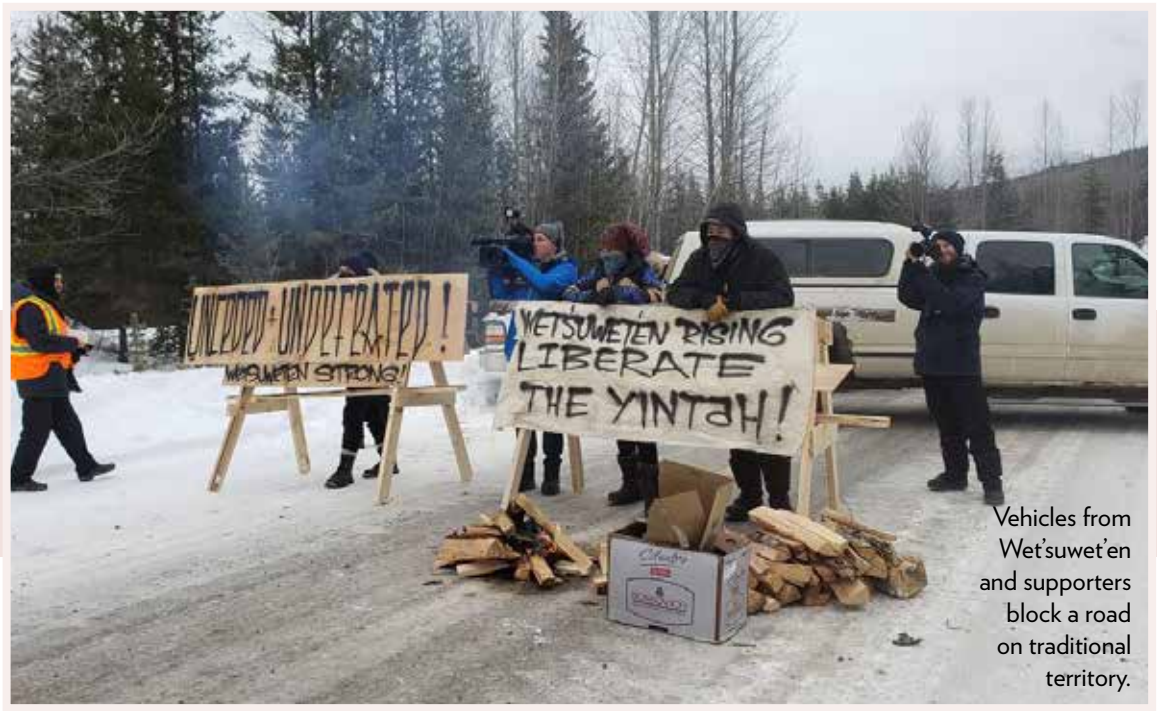
"They're not prone to do violence against anyone. But if you look at the whole situation, you'll see that violence is being done to our people again—either through physical intimidation or through the violence that comes from desecrating the land and desecrating your spirituality as people. That is violence in another form."

What, then, is the role of the church in relation to such disputes? In answering that question, Harwood-Jones offers something of a reality check.

Decades ago, when he was rector of a large parish in Winnipeg, one of his parishioners was a minister of the provincial government. In those days, the Anglican Church of Canada frequently issued what were known as "memorials" to the civil government offering the church's position on various issues.

One day, Harwood-Jones remembers, the government minister asked him, "Do you know what happens to churches' memorials?" Answering his own question, the minister said, "File 13"—a synonym for a garbage can.

"In many ways, the church's voice on secular matters is becoming increasingly irrelevant in the increasingly secular environment of Canada," Harwood-Jones says. Statistics seem to bear his opinion out. For example, a 2013 demographic study by the Pew Research Center, "Canada's Changing Religious Landscape," indicates that the fastest growing religious identity in Canada



Vehicles from Wet'suwet'en and supporters block a road on traditional territory.

PHOTO: UNIST'OT'EN CAMP VIA FACEBOOK

between 1971 and 2011 was "religiously unaffiliated." For that reason, Harwood-Jones suggests, popular reaction to church statements in general seems to be a collective shrug.

"The primate issued something in favour of the Wet'suwet'en? OK. It didn't hit any media that I saw," he says.

"We have to realize that at this point, we are no longer an arm of the state.... We have to speak to each other and to the world around us from a position of marginalization. And then we need to think about the issues that face our society."

Then there is the question of to what extent statements made by Anglican leaders reflect the will of the church as a whole. Harwood-Jones points to the example of divisions within the church over same-sex marriage.

"When a primate speaks out, who are they speaking for?" he asks. "They might be speaking for a sense of God's calling that this matter needs to be addressed in a certain way. But they're not speaking with the voice of the church, necessarily. You just need to go to some conservative Anglican churches to find that out."

Given the relatively marginal presence of the church in secular society, Harwood-Jones believes that the job of the church in a dispute such as that involving the Wet'suwet'en is simple: "The role of the church is to see to its Indigenous members and what they want."

In the diocese of Rupert's Land, for example, Harwood-Jones is currently on a board that is creating canons to give Indigenous elders a formal voice in diocesan synods. Manitoba, he notes, has a large population of Cree and Ojibwe people. Many are members of the Anglican Church of Canada and some are members of the synod.

"If our bishop makes a public stand on a matter affecting Indigenous folks, he or she is going to hear from our elders. That's reconciliation.... Listening to marginalized voices means listening to the Indigenous folks who feel they're not heard in our settler-dominated synods."

Responding to Anglicans who suggest that the role of the church in the standoff between Wet'suwet'en and the Canadian government and RCMP is to act as a "mediator" or "peacemaker" between the two sides, Doctor offers a skeptical view.

"That's kind of pie-in-the-sky to me, because the peacemaking needs to be done between the two parties that have stakes in it, and that's the Wet'suwet'en and the government, or whoever," Doctor says. "Those are the two that need to come together and talk and make the peace.... If the church gets called in or invited in, that's a whole different thing.

"But you have to remember that a lot of our First Nations people don't trust the church.... How can they be a peacemaker, and what have they done to really make peace, in terms of reconciliation and in terms of becoming right with God and...becoming right with so many injustices that have been done? What has the

church actually done? So I don't know that the church is the best institution to be invited in as a peacemaker."

In navigating between opposing groups in situations such as the Wet'suwet'en standoff, Delva finds the teachings of MacDonald on systemic racism to be helpful.

"The success of the colonial enterprise relies on the 'grassroots' people turning on one another—attacking and blaming the people we can literally see in front of us," Delva says. "It takes our focus away from the system that animates and supports ongoing injustice.

"When we as settlers focus our anger at people on a blockade, we are not using our energy to focus on the system that has planted, fertilized, tended the seeds of injustice that have led to these actions, and in so doing, we are not addressing the core of the injustice. If we do not do so, this will be ongoing."

The historical record of the Anglican Church of Canada, Delva points out, is a "pretty mixed bag" in terms of how it has responded to colonialism.

She recalls a quote by Dr. Hilda Hellaby, a deacon who worked for decades with Indigenous people, particularly the Gwich'in. In a letter Delva discovered years ago in archival records, Hellaby wrote, "When in doubt, choose the losing side. The winners don't need you, they're doing okay."

For Delva, those words stuck with her as "something Jesus would have said." In her personal opinion, the Anglican Church has often—perhaps even always—supported or been the "winners." But at the same time, "there have always been grassroots Anglicans who resisted."

During the internment of Japanese Canadians in the Second World War, Delva notes, "the church as an institution voted to support the internment, *but* there were many grassroots Anglicans who spoke against the Church's stance, and even chose to be interred with the Japanese."

While the Anglican church was deeply involved in the Indian residential school system and land occupation, "there have always been individual Anglicans who have blown the whistle, called for justice, refused to be part of systemic injustice, and they have often paid a high price for it.

"I feel that the institutional church is now wrestling with what it means to do things differently, and that is shaking people up a bit, and maybe that is a good thing."